

A balanced view of the Bible

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Introduction

I believe a balanced understanding of the Bible should be in harmony with how Jesus Christ viewed the Hebrew scriptures that are now incorporated into our Christian Bibles as the Old Testament. In addition, we need to face some serious questions about how to relate these scriptures to a belief that they are God inspired.

We can look at this subject under the following headings:

1. Some definitions of Bible inspiration.
2. Factual contradictions in the Bible?
3. Can we reconcile contradictions with Bible infallibility?
4. How did Jesus view the Old Testament writings?
5. How did New Testament writers quote the Old Testament?
6. Different types of literature in the Bible.
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1. Definitions of Bible Inspiration

Paul's second letter to Timothy is the most quoted passage relating to Bible inspiration. The Greek word used for 'inspired' is *theopneustos*. It is the only place in the Bible where this word is used. (2 Timothy 3:16)

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This passage reads; *All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness* (New King James Version)

'Vines Expository Dictionary of the New Testament Words' and most other authorities translate the Greek word *theopneustos* as '**Inspired by God**' rather than 'God breathed'. This translation was accepted by great Bible translators like Wycliffe, Tyndale and Coverdale and many current Bible scholars.

This translation of *theopneustos* allows space for the writers of books in the Bible to have used their own understanding of some issues, influenced by the culture and knowledge of their times. It also allows space for errors in historical details within some of the historical books. Some small errors or contradictions do exist and I will detail some of these in this article.

Each book that has been included in our Bible reflects the authors unique style of writing and may also reflect aspects of the culture and beliefs at the time they lived.

In other words, when we speak of the scriptures being Inspired by God, it is possible to accept that he did not force the writers to abandon their writing style or abandon aspects of the culture in which they were raised and lived.

Some Christians view the entire Bible as without error and infallible as originally given. This view attempts to overlook the relatively small errors and contradictions that do exist, by suggesting that they crept in due to scribe errors when making copies of the Bible writings. However, we do have many copies of portions of the Bible, spread over hundreds of years and in several languages, and these reveal hardly any errors that can be attributed to making copies. For instance, the Dead Sea Scrolls that date to before the birth of Jesus, contain a nearly complete copy of the book of Isaiah that is almost identical to the current book of Isaiah in the Bible.

Also some differences in details of accounts relating to the actions and miracles of Jesus definitely cannot be placed in a category of scribe copying errors. Some of these are listed in the next section.

Another reason not to accept every word in the old Testament as infallible, is that Jesus himself changed some Mosaic laws and interpretations. For instance, he changed the Mosaic justice law of 'eye for eye', to a new law of 'love your enemies'. He changed the Mosaic divorce laws that allowed men to easily divorce their wives. He changed this to outlawing divorce except in cases of adultery. Jesus also radically modified Mosaic laws in his Sermon on the Mount. He gave a series of cases introduced by "You have heard it was said by them of old time... But I say to you..." (Matthew chapter 5).

2. **Factual contradictions in the Bible?**

It is important to honestly face the fact that there are some errors and contradictions in the Bible manuscripts as we have them today.

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The following are some of the examples:

Who incited David to count the fighting men of Israel?

- God did (2 Samuel 24:1)
- Satan did (1 Chronicles 21:1)

How many fighting men were found in Israel?

- Eight hundred thousand (2 Samuel 24:9)
- One million, one hundred thousand (1 Chronicles 21:5)

The chief of David's mighty men killed how many at one time?

- Eight hundred (2 Samuel 23:8)
- Three hundred (1 Chronicles 11:11)

Who killed Goliath?

- David killed Goliath (1 Samuel chapter 17)
- Elhanan son of Jaare-oregim killed Goliath (2 Samuel 21: 19)
- Elhanan son of Jarre-oregim killed Lathmi the **brother of Goliath** (1 Chronicles 20:5)

How many were the descendants of Azgad?

- One thousand two hundred and twenty-two (Ezra 2:12)
- Two thousand three hundred and twenty-two (Nehemiah 7:17)

Jesus rode into Jerusalem on how many animals?

- One- a colt (Mark 11:7 and Luke 19:35)
- Two- a colt and an ass (Matthew 21:7)

Did Jesus allow his disciples to keep a staff on their journey?

- Yes (Mark 6:8)
- No (Matthew 10:9 and Luke 9:3)

Did Herod think Jesus was John the Baptist?

- Yes (Mathew 14:2 and Mark 6:16)
- No (Luke 9:9)

When Jesus entered Jerusalem did he cleanse the temple that same day?

- Yes (Matthew 21:12)
- No (Mark 11:1-17)

When Paul saw the light and fell to the ground, did his companions also fall to the ground?

- Yes (Acts 26:14)
- No (Acts 9:7)

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Did Herod want to kill John the Baptist?

- Yes (Matthew 14:5)
- No It was Herodius (Mark 6:20)

How many times did Jesus pray before his arrest?

- Three (Mathew 26:36-46 and Mark 14:32-42)
- One. (Luke 22:39-46).

Where was Jesus immediately after his baptism?

- Spirit immediately drove him to the wilderness for 40 days (Mark 1:12-13)
- Next day after baptism he called his disciples (John 1:35; 1:43; 2:1-11)

The Bible contains some other differences in the accounts about Jesus, as written in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. An illustration from our own experiences may help to understand some of these. For instance, there was a bad vehicle accident on a dual carriageway road. Two cars collided and both drivers were killed. There were no passengers but three witnesses gave their accounts of what happened.

The first witness said the accident was caused by a Mercedes car travelling very fast crashing into the back of a Toyota causing it to crash into a tree next to the road. The second witness said the Toyota driver suddenly changed lanes causing the Mercedes to crash into it and causing the Toyota to hit a tree. The third witness said a large dog ran out into the road causing the Toyota driver to suddenly swerve into the other lane and the Mercedes driver had no time to brake.

If there had only been one witness to the accident the investigating traffic officer would have received a limited account of what happened. In fact all three witnesses accurately reported what they noticed and a much fuller picture of what happened was obtained from combining details from all three accounts.

In similar manner, witnesses of miracles performed by Jesus did not all notice every detail. Differences in the accounts does not mean that the miracles did not take place!

3. Can we reconcile contradictions with Bible infallibility?

In the previous section I listed some of the contradictions. However, none of these relate to belief about God or any of the fundamentals of the Christian faith. Acceptance that contradictions exist has led some Christians to modify their initial views about the infallibility of the Bible and now they say that 'The Bible is infallible in all matters of faith and doctrine'. I personally prefer to say '**The Bible is our God inspired authority in all matters of faith and doctrine**'.

With reference to differences in some accounts in the four Gospel books, some of which are listed in this article, it is pointed out that this can be presented as strong evidence

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against the authors having constructed their accounts together. If that had been the case we would expect all details in the four accounts to agree. In other words, each of the writers Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, wrote about events that came to their minds under the prompting of the Holy Spirit. The slight differences in accounts are simply a reflection on how each writer remembered the events that took place. To be honest we must accept that some differences and even contradictions in details do exist. Clearly God did not **dictate** every word to these God inspired writers.

Since the writers were inspired by God to write their accounts, it is possible that God specifically allowed them to include details that seem to conflict, so that it counters any suggestions that the Gospel accounts were fabricated by a group of disciples.

The most held view of inspiration by orthodox Christianity is often called 'Verbal, plenary inspiration'. 'Verbal' refers to every word of Scripture. 'Plenary' means complete. Together, these terms indicate that God has inspired every word of scripture. **Certainly we can accept that God inspired the writers and ensured that the whole Bible has a united message regarding the essentials of revelations about God and how we can relate to him.** Also, regarding the prophetic sections, *For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.* (2 Peter 1:21 NIV).

However, in the light of the small conflicts in historical details outlined earlier and also the differences within the accounts relating to the life of Jesus, we cannot logically accept that 'every word' was 'dictated' by God to the authors of the four Gospel books.

4. How did Jesus view the Old Testament writings?

Jesus accepted the Old Testament as being divinely authoritative. He never cast doubt on any section and he assumed the mentioned people were actual people.

Jesus told his disciples after his resurrection, *"This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the **Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms**"* (Luke 24:44 NIV). The Law of Moses is the first 5 books in the Bible.

Jesus mentioned portions from all three sections of the Old Testament. In fact he quoted from at least twelve different Old Testament books. These included Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, 1 Samuel, 1 Kings, Psalms, Isaiah, Daniel, Hosea, Jonah, Zachariah and Malachi, but **he specifically emphasises the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.**

Jesus clearly believed the following characters were real people, namely Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, David, Solomon, the Queen of Sheba, Elijah, Elisha and Zechariah. He also referred to events as if they were factual. For instance;

- Moses gave the rite of circumcision (John 7:22)
- Manna was provided in the wilderness (John 6:31)
- David ate the Bread of Presentation (Matthew 12:3-4)
- David was the writer of some Psalms (Matthew 22:41-44)
- Moses wrote the Law (Matthew 8:4)

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- The prophets were persecuted (Matthew 5: 11-12)
- The popularity of the false prophets (Luke 6: 26)
- The events around Lot's wife (Luke 17:32)
- The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Matthew 10:14-15)
- The destruction of Tyre and Sidon (Matthew 11:21-22)
- A real Adam and Eve (Matthew 19:4-5)
- Cain and Abel conflict (Luke 11:50-52)
- The flood of Noah's generation (Matthew 24:37-39)
- Jonah and the great fish (Matthew 12:38-41)

Jesus also confirmed the authorship of books disputed in recent times:

- Daniel wrote the book of Daniel (Matthew 24:15)
- Isaiah wrote at least most of the Isaiah book (Matthew 8:16-17, John 12:37-38, John 12: 39-41).

5. **How did New Testament writers quote the Old Testament?**

There are about 342 places where the New Testament writers quote from the Old Testament. Most frequently quoted books are Deuteronomy (35 times), Psalms (95) and Isaiah (75).

The writings of Paul are the best examples of how Old Testament passages were quoted in order to show that the Gospel of Jesus Christ was supported by Old Testament teachings and how the Old Testament could be used in support of the New Covenant between God and mankind.

For instance, Paul supported his teaching on how God chooses people (election) by quoting old Testament examples, such as Abraham's two sons, Ishmael and Isaac, to show that although Ishmael was the firstborn, the blessings went to Isaac because of a promise made to Sarah (Romans 9:7 and 9 ; Genesis 21:12; 18:14).

When discussing Faith and Works, Paul again used Old Testament examples, such as Abraham receiving promises and blessings and covenants (solemn agreements) from God even before the laws of Moses were written. Paul uses this and other comparisons to argue that Christians can receive promises and blessings through faith in Christ and receive covenants with God without practicing the laws of Moses.

These examples suffice to show a practice throughout New Testament writings, of using Old Testament scriptures as support for explaining how the Gospel message was not in conflict with revelations from God given through Old Testament authors.

6. Different types of literature in the Bible

It is important to realise that the Old Testament is made up from 39 books and the New Testament from 27 books and the human authors are many.

The first five books, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy are probably all mainly authored by Moses, with a few additions after his death.

There are 12 Old Testament books that mainly record historical events. These are Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther.

The poetic books are Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon and Lamentations.

Sermons and prophetic writings are mainly in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zaphaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. I understand these book to be the prophetic books referred to by the Apostle Peter (2 Peter 1:21).

In the New Testament we also have a variety of documents. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, written by some of those who knew him best. Luke is a bit different in that his book is partly written from his first hand knowledge but also from his research and interviews with people who knew Jesus well.

Most of the other New Testament books are written to further explain the teachings of Jesus and to add insights given to the writers by the Holy Spirit. However, the book of Acts is primarily a record of some early church history and the book of Revelation is largely a prophetic book about future events, with much that cannot be easily understood.

7. The poetic books

Not all poetic writings are meant to be understood literally. For instance, *In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun, which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion, like a champion rejoicing to run his course. It rises at one end of the heavens, and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is hidden from its heat* (Psalm 19:4-6).

Some very meaningful and encouraging psalms, like Psalm 23, are not meant to be taken literally. Does the Lord literally, *make me lie down in green pastures, he leads me besides quiet waters?*

We normally accept that the poetic writings refer us to deeper spiritual truth. For instance, *The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars; the Lord breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon. He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, Sirion like a young wild ox. The voice of the Lord strikes with flashes of lightning, The voice of the Lord shakes the Desert of Kadesh. The voice of the Lord twists the oaks and strips the forests bare. And in his temple all cry "Glory"!* (Psalm 29: 5-9)

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In this Psalm God's majesty and power is acknowledged in all of creation. However, the psalmist David is not scientifically correct. It is not the thunder (voice) that splits the cedars but in fact it is the lightning. Do we doubt that David was inspired by God to write this poem of praise as he witnesses a thunderstorm? **Clearly God did not 'force' David to correct the scientific details.** This is one of many examples of how writings inspired by God still reflect the beliefs of the writers at the time that they lived, long before the scientific age.

The type of poems or prose seen in the prophetic books do to some extent reflect the style and knowledge of the God inspired writers.

8. The historical books

Comments on historical events over the centuries since Adam and Eve, are found in many of the Old Testament books. However, the main historical accounts relating to the history of Israel are found in the books of Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah. Some events are recorded in more than one of these books and when comparing details we do find some conflicting information, as shown earlier in this article.

Within these historical books we also have details about how God interacted with people, either individually, such as with Abraham, or nationally through his dealings with Israel.

Some of the historical accounts contain challenging and even disturbing events where the writer claims that God was consulted or even that God approved. However, in at least some of these cases, such as some events described in the books of Judges, it is more probable that the accounts are the writers opinion. If this is the case then it again shows that, although God inspired writers to record history, sometimes the views and biases of the writers were allowed (by God) to contain personal interpretations. The last verse of Judges is relevant where it says, *In those days Israel had no king; **everyone did as he saw fit.***

We see an example of this in Judges chapters 20 and 21. The Israelites fought against their fellow tribe the Benjamites and almost wiped them out. They decided on this action themselves and only after deciding to do it did they start asking God for guidance about how to fulfil their decision. How did they ask for guidance? We read, *We'll go up against it (the Benjamite city) **as the lot directs*** (Judges 20:9).

In other words they cast lots for guidance for a war that was not initially sanctioned by God and then they assumed that God would guide them through this casting of lots. It is true that elsewhere in the Bible God did sometimes guide through people casting lots. In all probability it was not God who guided in this instance because the initial course of action was not the result of God's guidance. In fact it was initiated after events that God definitely would not have sanctioned, as described in Judges chapter 19.

A bit later, before launching the attack they *enquired of God again. They said, who of us shall go first to fight against the Benjamites?'. The Lord replied, "Judah shall go*

first".(Judges 20:19). We should ask ourselves, **was it really the Lord that they consulted** and how did they do the consulting? Did God really guide them in this situation through the casting of lots or when they went to Bethel?

They should not have expected to be guided since they should have asked for guidance in the first place before deciding to attack. Did the Lord reply to their question about who should attack first? In the light of other scriptures about God and his ways, **It seems likely that their perceived instruction from God was not in fact from God.** We are told elsewhere in the Bible *'Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world (1 John 4:1).* False prophets are not only found in New Testament times!

This example is one of several historical accounts that raise questions about how much of the writers account of historical events was their own interpretation, rather than the actual truth. I believe we can find many other examples in the historical books where actions were attributed to God but in fact this was just the opinion of the writers.

9. The prophetic books

In many places the prophetic writings in the Bible refer to events around Israel at the time that the prophets wrote. However, scattered within these writings are passages that foretold aspects of the coming Messiah, whom Christians know was Jesus Christ. Normally it is only after the prophesied events have taken place that we see how the details in the prophecies were fulfilled.

Old Testament prophecies are often hidden within comments on current events. The writer may suddenly change theme, almost in mid sentence, and include a prophecy relating to future events. Some prophecies relate to a series of future events that may be separated from each other by hundreds of years, but the time-span is not clear from the wording.

As an example, *He (Jesus) went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:*

*"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners,
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to release the oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.*

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:16-21 NIV).

If we compare this quotation with the original prophecy, written in the book of Isaiah chapter 61, we find that **Jesus stopped his reading in the middle of a sentence**. The Isaiah passage continues, *to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour and the day of vengeance of our God.*

In other words, Jesus is saying that the first part of this prophecy was being fulfilled by him during his ministry in Israel. However, the 'day of vengeance of our God', known elsewhere in the Bible as 'Judgment Day', will only be fulfilled later.

This account of the words of Jesus is a good example of how to read other Bible prophecies, where the time scales are contracted. The prophecy will take place but possibly as a series of events, separated by long periods of time.

There are many Old Testament prophecies that were fulfilled in Jesus. The Jews accepted that several hundred passages referred to the future Messiah (deliverer). Nearly all of these were fulfilled by Jesus and the events associated with his life and teachings. We should realise that all of these prophecies were written prior to 250BC. This was confirmed from discovery of the 'Dead Sea Scrolls'. These scrolls contained parts of all but one of the Old Testament books, including an almost complete book of Isaiah. They were all written before the time of Jesus!

Possibly the most famous prophecy is found in Isaiah 53. It describes the sufferings of Jesus on the cross. If we compare details in this prophecy with details relating to the life and death of Jesus, we find truly amazing comparisons.

Another remarkable Old Testament prophecy fulfilled in the person of Jesus is:

*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.*

And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end,

he will reign on David's throne, and over his kingdom,

establishing and upholding it, with justice and righteousness,

from that time on and forever.

The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this (Isaiah 9:6-8)

Here we read about a human child who will become a ruler, but at the same time will be called mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace!. And his kingdom will be everlasting! What better description of the baby Jesus, crucified as a criminal, raised from death as a demonstration of his deity, and soon to return to rule from the throne of David in Jerusalem?

When we read these Old Testament prophecies that have been fulfilled then it is easy to agree with Peter when he wrote, as previously quoted' *You must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the*

Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20-21). Peter is referring specifically to prophecies, not necessarily to the Bible records of historical events.

When we look at the New Testament prophecies spoken by Jesus, we can see that many of them have already been fulfilled in great detail. I present these in my Web page article, ['Four major reasons to take Jesus seriously'](#).

10. **Hidden messages in the Bible due to the Cosmic Conflict**

I believe we will struggle to reconcile the events of human history, as written in the Bible, with belief in a God who is involved with details of his universe, unless we also accept that this earth is caught up in a spiritual conflict between God and Satan, between good and evil.

The Bible introduces us to this conflict through the Garden of Eden events and the reality of temptation and the reality of Satan, even though he speaks through a serpent. The following historical events, recorded in the Old Testament, show a progressive revelation of God to humanity and also reveal that his plans involve long periods of time. His call to Abraham and his promises to Abraham only came to fulfilment after Israel spent over 400 years in Egypt, 40 years in the wilderness and after hundreds of years of Israel's history.

We may ask why God did not plainly speak out his plans for saving humanity through Jesus Christ. We have a comment on this in the New Testament. Paul wrote, *we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory* (1 Corinthians 2:8).

Who are the 'rulers of this age' that Paul is referring to? He expands on this in the book of Ephesians chapter 6 as follows, *Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*

If Satan had fully known what he was doing when he motivated people to crucify the Lord of Glory, he would not have done it. He thought the crucifixion was his greatest victory, but it turned out to be the key event ensuring his ultimate defeat!

Why did Satan not understand that the death of Jesus would be a vital part God's plan? I have concluded that Satan was not able to work out the whole of God's plan because of the following:

- After Satan rebelled against God, the scriptures suggest he and his fellow rebel angels were cast down to earth. We read that he is now the *ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient* (Ephesians 2:2-3).
- Satan is now confined to time since he was cast out of God's Timeless Dimension of reality. He cannot see the future, only guess what will happen.

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- The Old Testament prophecies about the coming Messiah were known to Satan but they are deliberately written in words that do not clearly describe Calvary, nor how the death of Jesus would make a way for the forgiveness of sins.
- The whole of human history has been guided by God towards Calvary because the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ not only made a way of 'redemption' for humanity, but it was also another major step towards the final defeat of Satan.
- Why did God not simply destroy Satan and his rebellious angels? This is because God had limited himself by creating angels to be immortal (Luke 20:36).
- The fact that angels cannot die meant that God's final destiny for Satan and all rebellion is a place of confinement. Jesus said that Hell was created as the final place of confinement for Satan and his angels (Matthew 25:41).

This analysis helps me to understand why God did not clearly reveal himself to humanity in Old Testament times. Even Moses and the prophets were only able to understand a little and were enabled to write just enough detail so that in retrospect we can see how their prophecies about the coming Messiah were fulfilled. **God was guiding the evolution of history towards Calvary and he needed to confuse Satan and ensure God's final defeat of Satan and of all rebellion in the universe.**

Another reason why God does not reveal himself as clearly as he could do, is that humanity have been given a free will. In other words, the ability to make choices. In a universe locked into a cosmic conflict **it becomes important to test loyalties**. Throughout the Bible the importance of faith is emphasised. Mankind have been given just enough evidence for the existence of God, through the mysteries and fine tuning of the universe, and through historical events, so as to exert faith in his existence. In addition, the Israelites were shown on many occasions how, whenever they were in serious trouble from enemies and they turned to God for forgiveness and deliverance, then they experienced deliverance.

In other words, people throughout history, including today, who have sought seriously for God have discovered that he does reveal himself. As the Bible book of Hebrews says, *Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists **and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him*** (Hebrews 11:6).

11. Comparing scriptures to determine meaning more accurately

I will give just three examples of how comparing scriptures can give us a balanced view of the meaning of some Bible passages:

1. Does the Hebrew word 'pas', translated as 'all' in the Bible, actually mean 'everything', or does it often mean 'some of all' ?
2. What did Jesus mean when he said *"I tell you the truth, this 'generation' will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened"* (Matthew 24: 34).
3. Does Isaiah 53: 5 refer mainly to healing of sickness or healing from the guilt and penalty of sin?

11.1. The meaning of 'ALL' in the Bible

It may come as a surprise to some that this small word 'ALL' **does not always mean 'everything'** that is being referred to. For instance, consider the recorded 'plagues of Egypt'.

Exodus chapter 9 describes a plague that killed the animals. *'And the next day the Lord did it: **ALL the livestock of the Egyptians died**, but not one animal belonging to the Israelites died' (verse 6).*

However, a bit later we read about the plague of hail, *'therefore, at this time tomorrow I will send the worst hailstorm that has ever fallen on Egypt, from the day it was founded till now. Give an order now to **bring your livestock** and everything you have in the field to a place of shelter, because the hail will fall on every man and animal that has not been brought in and is still out in the field, and they will die (verse 18-19). Throughout Egypt hail struck everything in the fields – **both men and animals**; it beat down everything growing in the fields and stripped every tree. The only place it did not hail was in the land of Goshen, where the Israelites lived. (Verse 25-26)*

Clearly not all the Egyptian animals died in the first plague since there were still others to die from the hail.

Then again, we read about the death of all the first born in Egypt. *'At midnight the Lord struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, who sat on the throne, to the firstborn of the prisoner, who was in the dungeon, and **the firstborn of all the livestock as well** (Exodus 12:29).*

Comparison of these three events clearly shows that the use of the word ALL did not mean 'everything' or 'all of the animals'. From the context it clearly means that 'some of all' the Egyptian animals died in the plague but 'none of all' the Israelite animals died. We can therefore conclude that the use of the word ALL does not always mean what we often understand by this word.

In fact there are many places in the Bible where this word ALL does not mean 'everything' or 'everyone'. It very often means 'some of all'.

For instance, in the book of Acts we have a description of events on the Day of Pentecost. Peter explained the exuberance, boldness and speaking in other tongues by the disciples, as a fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecy found in the book of Joel. The prophecy reads, *'And afterwards, I will pour out my Spirit on **ALL** people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. (Joel 2:28-29).*

At Pentecost God's Spirit was released into 'all categories' of people, not just a selected few, as was the case in the Old Testament times. Now God's Spirit was poured out on men,

women, old and young. In fact the Spirit was now available to **'some of ALL categories of humanity'**, rather than just for a few selected categories such as priests, kings and prophets.

There are many other places in the Bible where ALL actually means 'some of all'. In other words we should be very cautious about our interpretation of passages that include the word 'all'.

11.2. The words of Jesus relating to the End of the Age

In Matthew, Mark and Luke we read accounts of words spoken by Jesus regarding events at the 'end of the age'. In all three accounts we read words that have puzzled many generations of Christians, *I tell you the truth, **this generation** will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away* (Matthew 24:34; Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32 NIV translation).

Clearly, the events described by Jesus relating to his promised return did not take place in the generation who heard his words, nor in many generations since. However, in my opinion the confusion has arisen because translators of the Greek words have not carefully followed the important principle of comparing scripture with scripture.

The important key to understanding this passage is found in Matthew's account. We read the initial question asked by the disciples, that led to Jesus recounting events that would take place before he returned.

Jesus had just commented on the Jerusalem temple and told his disciples that a time was coming when not one stone would be left standing on another. The disciples responded by asking the question: ***What will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?*** (Matthew 24:3)

It is only the Matthew account that clearly states this initial question.

If we look at the Greek words used in this question we find that the 'end' is the word *sunteleia*. This actually means **'full end'**. We may ask what 'full end' are the disciples asking about? This word has been incorrectly translated in some English language Bibles as 'end of the world'. However, the Greek word translated here as 'world' is actually *aeon*. The meaning of *aeon* is more commonly **'age'**, 'indefinite time' or 'dispensation'.

Therefore, the question asked by the disciples was, *"Tell us", they said, "when will this happen and what will be the sign of your coming and of **'the full end of this age'**?"*

After the disciples asked this question, Jesus gave an account of wars, earthquakes, the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple and other events so terrifying and dangerous that the survival of all life seems to be in jeopardy. Then, in the Luke account Jesus said, *"Look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near"* (Luke 21:29).

Then follows this dramatic statement, *“I tell you the truth, this GENE (Greek word) will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away”.*

It seems that most translators of this word ‘genea’ have not taken into account the context and content of all three gospel accounts. As a result they have translated the word as ‘generation’. Although this is the most common translation of ‘genea’ it is not the only possible translation. Other less common but nevertheless acceptable translations of *genea* are ‘age’, ‘nation’ or ‘time’. Bible concordances note that *genea* is translated in other places in the Bible, as ‘age’ (2 times), ‘nation’ (1 time) and ‘time’ (2 times).

For instance, in Ephesians 3:21, *Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages (genea), world without end. Amen* (King James version). In most other translations we read, *throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen* (NIV translation).

In Colossians 1:26 we read, *the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations*. In other words *generations`* is used in a context implying a long period of time.

It must be accepted that the more usual translation of *genea* is ‘generation’. However, if we compare all three Gospel accounts, this apparently difficult passage can be regarded as a **direct answer to the initial question** that led Jesus to recount the future world events, leading up to the end of this age. In summary:

The initial question: *“Tell us, they said, “when will these things happen and what will be the sign of your coming and the **full end of this age**”?”*

Answer by Jesus: *“Truly truly (without a doubt) I say to you, **this AGE** (genea) will certainly not come to a ‘full end’ until all these things (that I have told you about) come to pass”.*

This explanation enables us to avoid some previous attempts by Christians to explain away the difficulty posed by the reference to ‘generation’. Some had suggested that the reference by Jesus to the fig tree was significant. In Matthew’s account the only tree mentioned is the fig. They pointed out that the fig tree is sometimes associated in the Bible with Israel. Therefore, it was suggested that the budding of the fig tree could refer to the founding of the modern state of Israel in 1948. However, this explanation falls away when we compare the Matthew and Luke accounts. In Luke 21:29 it says *‘the fig tree and **all the trees***.

Clearly the reference to trees sprouting new leaves is an illustration of the fact that budding of new leaves heralds the approach of spring and summer. In like manner, Jesus is saying, when you see all these things I have spoken about actually taking place, you will know that the ‘full end of this age’ is near.

We might ask why God allowed the Gospel writers to use this word ‘genea’ instead of the more usual word for ‘age’ (aeon). My suggestion is that God wanted this scripture to keep Christians in all generations expecting the imminent return of Jesus Christ.

11.3. What does Isaiah 53:5 mean?

This passage reads, *But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and **by his wounds we are healed.***

This passage is probably the most quoted in relation to healing from sickness. However, if we compare scripture with scripture we find that the Apostle Peter understood it differently. We read, *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls* (1 Peter 2:24).

Peter clearly links this passage ‘*by his wounds you have been healed*’ with being healed from going astray and healed from the guilt of sin. He does not link it to being healed from sicknesses. The NIV Study Bible commentary on Isaiah 53:5 states ‘healed here probably equivalent to “forgiven”’.

Fortunately there are other Bible passages relating to healing but we need to take note that many of them include the word ‘all’. In the light of my comments on the use of ‘all’ in the Bible, we need some caution when formulating our teaching about healing. The clearest instruction relating to healing is found in James 5:13- 16.

The fact that Jesus healed and even raised the dead tells us that similar healings can and sometimes do take place today through the power of the risen Jesus Christ. We know that forgiveness of sins is a fundamental reality that came to believers through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Forgiveness is fundamental to the atonement that Jesus achieved on the cross. However, healing of sicknesses is not, in my understanding, an automatic result of the atonement. I discuss this in [‘A New look at Evangelical Christianity’](#), downloadable from my webpage.

12. **Comparing scriptures with scientific discovery to determine meaning more accurately**

Before the scientific age many Bible scholars used scriptures to support their view that the earth is flat or that the sun and stars rotate around the earth or that the earth is about 6000 years old. However, the advance of scientific discoveries has forced us to look again at the scriptures we thought supported these views. This has enabled many Christians to discover that scripture is flexible. The Bible is not a textbook of science but God is revealing much more about his power, wisdom and how he operates in his universe, through a study of his creation.

An article on my webpage: [‘Some keys to understanding the Bible’](#) expands on the importance of comparing passages in the Bible and the importance of listening to the ‘Voice

of God' speaking to us from creation, greatly expanded in our generation through the discoveries of science.

Regarding the importance of listening to scientific discoveries and their relationship to the Bible, I refer you to my articles on the webpage that can be opened here.

- [The age of our world.](#)
- [The days of the Genesis creation account](#)
- [Reconciling the Genesis creation account with science](#)
- [Evidence AGAINST a world-wide flood.](#)

My webpage www.factandfaith.co.za explores how it is possible to achieve a harmony between scientific discovery and biblical revelation, without having to reject any essential part of the Gospel message. For instance in my article '[Genesis Creation, Science and Christianity](#)'.

13. Comparing teachings about God in the Old and New Testament scriptures

The most comprehensive teachings about God in the Old Testament are those passed on to the Israelites by Moses. God's character is also revealed through his interactions with the Israelites and with surrounding nations.

The Israelites were taught that God is ONE, *Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one* (Deuteronomy 6:4). However, God also revealed to Moses that this ONE God existed in three persons or three forms. On Mount Sinai God said, *And the Lord said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion". But, he said, "you cannot see my face, for no-one may see my face and live".*

However, after Moses had descended from the mountain, God met with him in the 'Tent of Meeting'. Here we are told that they spoke together 'face to face'. We read, *God said "When a prophet of the Lord is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the Lord.* (Numbers 12:6-8). This is a revelation of the second person of the Trinity God, namely Jesus Christ.

In addition, God met with Moses and others through his Holy Spirit. We read, *Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke with him (Moses) and he took of the Spirit that was on him and put the Spirit on the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied, but they did not do so again.*

However, two men, whose names were Eldad and Medad, had remained in the camp. They were listed among the elders, but did not go to the tent. Yet the Spirit also rested on them and they prophesied in the camp (Numbers 11: 25-26).

Clearly the TRINITY nature of the ONE God, is not only revealed in the New Testament. Christians understand that Jesus was 'God become man'. This same Jesus is spoken of as the

'time travelling Jesus' who was present at the creation and we read, *he made the universe* (Hebrews 1: 2, Colossians 1; 15-17). He is the, *Word became flesh and lived for a while among us* (John 1: 14). If we accept that revelation of Jesus, then the Old Testament appearances of God in 'human' form were none other than the time-travelling Jesus!

We read in the New Testament that it was Jesus Christ who accompanied the Israelites out of Egypt and through the Sinai Desert. This is one interpretation of the words Paul wrote about the Israelites in the wilderness, *for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and **that rock was Christ*** (1 Corinthians 10: 4). Other Old Testament accounts speak of God in human form interacting with Adam and Eve, with Abraham and later with Joshua before the battle of Jericho.

Abraham was visited by three 'men' and he addressed one of them as God. The other two were angels because we read that they they left and went down to Sodom to bring Lot out before that city was destroyed. However, the third visitor was addressed by Abraham, *The men turned away and went towards Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the Lord. Then Abraham approached him and said "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?"* (Genesis 18: 22-23). Then followed a verbal interaction between Abraham and the one he identified as God.

It is important to accept that the character and actions attributed to God in the Old Testament are being attributed to the same God revealed to us by Jesus Christ in the New Testament. **Do we accept that God's character does not change?**

It is helpful to compare revelations about God in the New Testament and Old Testament writings. Although the central themes of Jesus Christ's teachings are related to God's love for humanity, we are also reminded that God needs to be approached with reverence and awe.

Paul reminds us about the Israelites being rescued from Egypt and being miraculously led through the Reed Sea (not Red Sea) but, *nevertheless, **God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert.** Now these things occurred as examples, to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "These people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry. We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did – and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. We should not test the Lord, as some of them did and were killed by snakes. And do not grumble, as some of them did – and were killed by the destroying angel* (1 Corinthians 10:5-10).

Are accounts such as these in harmony with the God revealed to us in the New Testament, through the words and actions of Jesus Christ?

We correctly love to celebrate the love, mercy and grace of God but sometimes forget that he is still the same God who told the Israelites through Moses, *See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse – the blessing if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving to you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the Lord your God*

and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods (Deuteronomy 11:26-29).

From the history of Israel we see how obedience brought peace, good crops and other blessings while disobedience brought pestilences, conflict and poor crops.

This same reality is given within the New Testament writings, *If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but **only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.** Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. **How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?. For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay" and again, "The Lord will judge his people". **It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.***** (Hebrews 10:26-30).

In the Old Testament we have examples of cities like Sodom and Gomorrah being destroyed by God because of the wickedness of its people. We have instructions given to Moses and Joshua to destroy cities and all the inhabitants while entering the promised land of Canaan. We may ask how this relates to the character of God as revealed in the New Testament and through the words of Jesus, such as 'love your enemies' or 'do good to those who persecute you'.

In the New Testament book of Acts **we have the account of Ananias and Sapphira** who dropped dead when Peter challenged them about their dishonesty with money. Many of us can probably identify with being dishonest about money and we do not drop dead. However, this does not mean that God overlooks such dishonesty today. The account in Acts should remind us that we cannot mock God and expect no consequences, either in this life or at Judgment Day.

The words of Jesus help us to see that **God has short term and long term agendas.** The short term agendas may seem harsh to us but when the long term agendas are revealed we start to see that the short term events were necessary in order to direct history towards the goal of saving humanity from the enemy (Satan) in the Cosmic Conflict.

As a zoologist **I see how God's short term agendas included stages on earth, such as the Age of Dinosaurs. They were later destroyed,** and this created conditions needed for a world suitable for humanity. In nature we see the evolution of short term realities that led to longer term realities. The fossil record shows many periods of mass extinctions of life forms.

In the case of humanity we can trace some of God's short term programmes, such as the calling of Abraham, the creation of Israel as a nation, the conquest of Canaan, the conquest of Israel by the Romans and many other examples. All of these stages were steps in the evolution of God's revelation to mankind. All of these were needed to guide history towards Jesus Christ and Calvary.

Then we come to the new reality of how all of this relates to a God of love, justice, mercy and grace. We start to understand this through the life, words and actions of Jesus Christ.

Jesus revealed that past events in history were only part of the story. For instance, the people destroyed in Sodom and Gomorrah will all stand with the people spoken to by Jesus during his earthly ministry and with all people who have ever lived. At judgment Day the 'books will be opened' and we will be judged according to what we have done or have failed to do. However, what we have done will be judged in the light of what we knew we should have done. The greatest question will be what we have done with Jesus Christ?

Although those who believed in Jesus and accepted him into their lives as Saviour and Lord, have been given forgiveness and Eternal Life, there are many who never heard of Jesus during their lives on earth who will find much mercy at Judgment Day. Jesus compared the people who had seen his miracles but had not accepted his message, with the people of Sodom who had been destroyed because of their evil lifestyles. Jesus said, *"If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. But I tell you **it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you**"* (Matthew 11:23-24).

We read a further comment by Jesus on other cities such as Tyre and Sidon. *"If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you"* (Matthew 11:21- 22).

Through similar words of Jesus **we start to understand that many past events, such as the destruction of cities at God's command, are only part of the full picture.** Many who never heard of Jesus, such as Old Testament people and many even today who only heard a distorted version of the Gospel message, will find more mercy from Jesus at Judgment Day than many who knew much more but rejected the truth. Jesus was very accepting of the prostitutes and 'sinners' of his time who recognised their need of forgiveness, but he was very harsh and condemning of the hypocrites who knew the truth but failed to live by it.

I cover these thoughts in greater detail in articles on my webpage, such as the freely downloadable book '[Big Bang Christianity](#)'. In this I have chapters on 'God of love' and 'God of Justice'.

14. **The evolution of God's revelations to humanity**

God has directed human history from the time of Adam and Eve up to now and this has been a step by step evolution of revelation.

14.1: Through Adam and Eve

The account of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, gives us an introduction to the whole Bible. This teaches us the reality of a conflict between right and wrong and the existence of a conflict in the spiritual dimension between God and Satan.

We are shown that mankind have been given a Free Will and can choose between following God's plans or our own plans. Even when placed in the ideal surroundings of a **specialy planted garden**, Adam and Eve chose to disobey their Creator. This brought estrangement between God and Adam and Eve. In Adam and Eve humanity experienced the first sin, namely disobedience against God or falling short of his standards. They were the first created beings to be given a law from God and so they became the first to commit a sin.

Adam and Eve demonstrated God's plan for man and woman to complement each other and become one, and the importance of this for the production of children and for their raising up to adulthood.

Adam and Eve were told to subdue factors around them that were potentially harmful. Mankind have a God appointed role to wisely rule over creation. The account also gives us hope that God has made a plan to counter the destructive activity of Satan.

Adam and Eve demonstrated that God desires a close and intimate relationship with people, based on our free will choice to obey him.

14.2 : Through Noah

The account of Noah and the flood teaches us the importance of faith in God. Noah believed God and put his faith into practical action by building the Ark. The flood was not world-wide. See my article, [Evidence AGAINST a world-wide flood](#).

The account again emphasises the fact that God has short term and long term agendas. The achievement of his end goals sometimes necessitates destruction of existing realities. However, when we combine the flood narrative with the New Testament commentary, we realise that God still had a destiny for those drowned in the flood.

We read, *For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built* (1 Peter 3:18-20).

If Jesus preached to those who died in the flood of Noah's time, this surely means that they were capable of responding to that preaching. How about those who died in other events, such as the destruction of Sodom? Is this how Jesus knew that *The men of Sodom would have repented in sackcloth and ashes if they had seen the miracles that were performed by Jesus in Capernaum?*

14.3: Through Abraham

The account of Abraham again highlights the importance of Faith in God. He believed God and put his faith into practical action. He left his home and became a wanderer in a foreign land because God asked him to do this. On more than one occasion Abraham did difficult things because God asked him to do them. We are told that Abraham pleased God because of his faith. It was a quality of faith that led to action.

God promised Abraham that through his descendants one would come who would bless all nations. This was a prophecy that was confirmed by God when he entered into a solemn agreement with Abraham. A solemn promise to Abraham, that was called a Covenant. This promise was fulfilled hundreds of years later in the person of Jesus Christ.

Through God's interactions with Abraham we again see how God plans to interact with humanity over long periods of time. He has a step by step agenda and an evolving revelation of himself to mankind.

14.4. Through Moses

Through Moses, God created a nation by miraculously saving them from slavery in Egypt and then instructed Moses to give them the 10 commandments and other instructions about how they must live as a nation and in relationship with God. It was made clear that it was only possible to approach God on his terms.

Central to Israelite life was a special meeting place. At first it was a large movable tent but later it was a large temple. Part of the worship instructions emphasised the fact that forgiveness of sins could only come through the shedding of blood of an innocent animal. This was pointing forward to the time when God would fulfil the promise made to Abraham and Jesus Christ would come to earth and die on the cross as the one final perfect sacrifice of a sinless person, shedding his blood to take away the sins of all people who come to God through Jesus Christ.

14.5: Through Prophets

Old Testament prophets were used by God to challenge Israel to keep faithful to God. In addition, within these prophecies and sermons we find predictions of future events, including events that would take place through the Messiah. Many of these were fulfilled through the life of Jesus Christ and a few are still to be fulfilled when he returns to earth.

Looking back on how these prophecies were fulfilled can help us to understand that God is in overall control of human history.

14.6: Through History

The Israelite nation demonstrated to us the fact that material and spiritual blessings depend upon a right relationship with God. We are introduced to the principle of Blessings or

Curses. This was demonstrated again and again through what happened to Israel when they obeyed or disobeyed God.

Establishing Israel in the land of Canaan was essential for God's long term agenda, to save humanity from the dominion of Satan, through Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection.

14.7: Through Jesus Christ

Through the words and actions of Jesus Christ, **humanity have at last been shown the main purposes of God in relation to humanity.** History has been guided by God towards Calvary because the death and resurrection of Jesus was the key event that will lead to the final defeat of Satan and to the final end of the Cosmic Conflict.

This has been so important in God's agendas because he has an amazing Eternal Life destiny for countless millions of humanity. He has a planned 'New Heavens and New Earth' and, in the prophetic words of the book of Revelation, *And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away (Revelation 21:3-4).*

15. **The New Covenant Gospel of love**

Through Jesus, God was opening the way to bless people of **all nations**, just as promised to Abraham and predicted in several places in the Old Testament section of the Bible.

During the three years when Jesus was teaching the people he went out of his way to tell them that a **New Way was now coming. Instead of repeating over and over the 10 commandments he taught what is known as the Sermon on the Mount:**

Basically he was saying that what is important to God is our hearts, not just keeping of Laws. (Matthew 5:1-10.)

Jesus changed many of the Old Testament instructions:

He said *"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them"* He was not saying that those laws were wrong. They were important for the Israelite nation but Jesus was saying that he was bringing a new and better way. He was 'fulfilling' what the prophets had been telling would happen but he was also going to bring in a **New Way or New Covenant** and, as we will see a bit later, this actually brought the Old Covenant to an end, meaning it was no longer the central part of how we can relate to God.

Jesus changed many Old Testament rules of behaviour. For instance,:

Jesus said *"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye and tooth for tooth' but I tell you, Do not resist an evil person..."* and *"You have heard that it was said' Love your neighbour*

and hate your enemy' But I tell you Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5: 38-48).

Jesus also went out of his way to do things on the Jewish Sabbath and when criticised told the people that he is Lord of the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1-8, Mark 2: 23-28, Luke 6: 1-5).

In order to make it clear what he meant by 'love your neighbours' and the importance of love, Jesus said things like the following:

Jesus answered, " *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind, This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second **is like it**, 'Love your neighbour as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments"* (Matthew 22: 37-40).

It is very significant that **Jesus linked these two laws as equally important**. In the Old Testament 10 commandments they are not closely linked. Jesus was again emphasising that **the New Way that he was bringing into the world was based on love**.

On another occasion he was asked, "*Teacher, What must I do to **inherit eternal life?**"* Jesus answered, "*What is written in the Law? How do you read it?"* He answered, "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and 'Love your neighbour as yourself'".*

*"You have answered correctly" Jesus replied. "**Do this and you will live**".*

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus. "And who is my neighbour?"

In reply Jesus told the story of the man beaten up by robbers. It was the despised Samaritan who took pity on the man and dressed his wounds (Luke 10: 30-37).

In this reply **Jesus was again emphasising that love was the central feature of the New Covenant that he was bringing into the world**. Furthermore, by telling how the despised Samaritan was the loving one, Jesus was telling the Jewish people that the sort of love God was looking for was shown to all humanity, not just to Jews.

We do not have space here to give all the relevant scriptures about the centrality of love in the message Jesus brought to the world. However, the scriptures include:

Jesus said , "*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. **All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another**"* (John 13:34-35).

Jesus said, "**Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me**. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him" (John 14: 21).

Jesus said, "**Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent**" (John 17:3).

The apostle John wrote: *Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, **because God is love*** (1 John 4: 7-8).

How do we know that God is love? We know it from the life of Jesus, healing the sick and accepting the outcasts of humanity. Supremely through his death on the cross. We read, *“Greater love has no-one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command”* (John 15:13).

What is the essence of what Jesus commanded? It is to love God, love your brothers and sisters, but also to love all of humanity because that is the sort of love that God has, and this is the sort of love revealed through the life and death of Jesus.

Jesus followed up on his teachings about love by telling his disciples during the ‘last supper’ meal how he was about to give them a New Covenant. In other words a **New Agreement between God and all of humanity**. (Mathew 26:17-30, Mark 14: 12-26, Luke 22: 7-39 and John 13: 1-17)

*While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to the disciples saying, “Take and eat; this is my body”. Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. **This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins*** (Mathew 26:26-28).

*Jesus said, “This cup is the **New Covenant** in my blood, which is poured out for you”.*

Jesus had lived a life demonstrating the nature of true sacrificial love. Now he was about to demonstrate how far the love of God would go. He was about to voluntarily die on a cruel Roman cross, in agony and in shame, all because he *so loved the world* (John 3:16).

The disciples slowly came to realise **how dynamic this new Covenant of love was**. They summarised it in various ways in New Testament writings:

Submit to one another..... Just as Jesus Christ did
 Forgive one another Just as Jesus Christ did
 Encourage one another..... Just as Jesus Christ did
 Restore one another Just as Jesus Christ did
 Accept one another Just as Jesus Christ did
 Care for one another Just as Jesus Christ did
 Bear with one another Just as Jesus Christ did
 Carry one another’s burdens ... Just as Jesus Christ did

That is why the apostle John wrote towards the end of his life:

*We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. **Anyone who does not love remains in death.*** (1 John 3: 14).

*Dear friends, let us love one another, **for love comes from God.** Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because **God is love.** This is how God showed his love amongst us. He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.*

*Dear friends, since God so loved us, we ought to love one another. No-one has ever seen God; but **if we love each other, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us** (1 John 3:7-12).*

The new LOVE Agreement (The Gospel message) that Jesus brought into the world replaced the Law Agreement that God introduced through Moses for the Israelite nation. We no longer have to keep the Sabbath or offer animal sacrifices or keep strict rituals and ceremonies.

We have been introduced to the **freedom of the New Love Covenant.** If we can allow God's Holy Spirit within us to grow us further and further into understanding how to love like Jesus showed us to love, then it is that love that changes the world. It is God's Holy Spirit within us who wants to create within us a heart of true love, but we must co-operate with Him.

True love will not allow us to exploit or harm our fellow man or woman. It will teach us to treat everyone as people who God wants to bless, **not as things for us to use and then discard.**

The first century Christians were a love movement that was Irresistible, to many who were bound up in laws and rituals, guilt, anger, racialism, pride and fear. Within a few years the early Christians had been used by God to dramatically change the Roman Empire and this led to the widespread closing of heathen temples. **Is our understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ IRRESISTIBLE?**

16. **Human history is HIS STORY: All about Jesus**

The Bible says that Jesus Christ was present at the creation of the Universe (John 1: 1-3, Colossians 1:15-19, Hebrews 1:1-3).

Jesus was involved in the Garden of Eden interactions with Adam and Eve. He was involved with calling Abraham and appearing to him, he was involved with Moses and the prophets.

We know so much more now through the teachings and life of Jesus. We accept his deity through his miracles, through the resurrection and ascension. Now we wait for the final dramatic events that will herald the end of this age and the final victory of God over Satan and the end of all cosmic rebellion.

History is the story of God's interactions with his creation. When all of history has been fulfilled and Satan is confined to Hell, then humanity will at last realise that all the unexplained events during Old Testament history were part of God's overall plan and motivation. That overall plan was summarised by Jesus when talking with Nicodemus, **"For**

God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him” (John 3:16-17).

Jesus said, *“You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life”* (John 5:39). The scriptures are designed to lead us to personally discover God.

17. **The Bible as ‘Living Word’**

The Bible can be understood to be ‘Living Word’, because its predominant message is about the Living God and the Living Jesus Christ and the Living Holy Spirit (The Trinity God). It is God’s WORD to us, progressively revealed through his interactions with humanity.

In addition, some Christians call it the Living Word because it can guide us in day by day decisions. When we are looking for answers to questions or needing to make decisions, then Bible verses may come to mind or we just open the Bible on a passage and certain words stand out that are relevant to the decisions we need to make.

Christians believe that God can guide them when having to make important decisions. The Bible can provide important guidelines, such as the importance of honesty, not marrying unbelievers etc. In addition, the Holy Spirit can lead us to a Bible verse that can guide us when making important decisions. Sometimes such verses are not taken within the context of the wider meaning of the chapter but they may confirm guidance received from other sources, such as advice from friends or logical analysis of situations.

When Bible verses seem to stand out and speak into a situation, those who believe that God does sometimes guide in this way may call the Bible the ‘Living Word’. My own understanding is that God can and does guide us when we ask him to do so. However, this **guidance comes in many different ways**. For instance through ‘doors’ being opened or closed, through advice of friends, through us having peace about making a decision, or through us reading something that seems to have come to our notice unexpectedly.

If we only rely on the Bible for guidance by opening it at random, this can sometimes lead us in the wrong direction. It is wise to do this only as part of a much wider process of seeking guidance.

Although the Bible is a combination of writings by a variety of authors who were inspired by God to write, this amazing book carries a **special supernatural authority and anointing**. It is used by God to inspire and guide us towards entering into a personal and intimate relationship with him. Jesus emphasised the importance of the first five Bible books (the Law), the prophetic books and the Psalms. In addition we have the New Testament books that enable us to better understand the whole Bible and to understand the WORD of God, especially through Jesus Christ; *The ‘Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us’* (John 1:14 NIV)

By faith, many people accept that there is a **supernatural ‘anointing’** placed by God on the Bible. It contains many promises for those who accept that it is the main way that God has decided to reveal himself to humanity.

The ‘voice of God’, speaking to us through the Bible, together with revelations about himself revealed through our study of his creation, and together with personal experiences of his interactions with our lives, all form part of his WORD. Through the Bible we discover the central profound truth, that *the WORD became flesh and lived for a while among us* (John 1:14).

18. A balanced view of the Bible

The words of Paul to Timothy can be our motivation., *Do your best to present yourselves to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed **and who correctly handles the word of truth*** (2 Timothy 2:15).

I believe correctly handling the word of truth includes looking seriously at the issues raised in this article. In this way we can reach a balanced view of scripture that enables us to be un-ashamed to uphold its truths in this generation, raised and surrounded by our scientific and technological discoveries. **It is a generation that has many questions that need to be answered** by us, if we are serious about bringing the Gospel message to those we meet.

Christians need to give **‘Fact Based Answers’ to the many ‘Fact Based Questions’**. Too often ‘Faith Based Answers’ are given to ‘Fact Based Questions’ that are asked by millions living in our generation. These ‘Faith Based Answers’ do not satisfy most people and can lead to many not taking the Bible seriously.

For instance, one **‘Fact Based Question’** can be: “How long ago was the earth created ? “

A ‘Faith Based Answer’ might be: *The earth is about 6000 years old because the Bible says so.* (This is not what I would say but it is the sort of answer given by ‘Six Day Creationists’)

A ‘Fact based answer’ could be: *The earth is, according to scientific discoveries, at least 4.5 billion years old and fortunately the Bible can be reconciled with this conclusion, provided we are willing to look at **legitimate** alternative interpretations of the Genesis creation account.*

For FACT BASED answers see [‘Genesis Creation, Science and Christianity’](#).

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